Date: June 2021

To: Mayor Tarter and Members of Falls Church City Council

From: Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transportation

Subject: Guiding Principles for Neighborhood Sidewalk and Accessibility Program

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Background

"Mobility for All Modes," the transportation chapter of the City' Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2014, includes a planned policy action to adopt a pedestrian facilities program and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan that includes:

1. a system for responding to requests for pedestrian safety and accessibility, such as crosswalks and signage
2. a system by which residents can monitor individual requests, such as a tracking number
3. annual funding for maintenance of pedestrian facilities
4. an ADA Transition Plan to address known ADA deficiencies in the pedestrian network

To help achieve these goals as the City continues to evolve from a car-centric suburb to a more walkable, bike-friendly urban setting, the CACT recommends these guiding principles for creating a Neighborhood Sidewalk and Accessibility Program.

Recommendations

Like the Neighborhood Traffic Calming (NTC) Program, a Neighborhood Sidewalk and Accessibility Program should be citizen-led, though City staff should maintain ways to build necessary sidewalks and implement accessibility improvements.

During a well-publicized period each year, citizens can submit project requests to CACT for initial review before funding decisions are made for the City's Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Rather than accept applications on a rolling basis, this will enable City staff to prepare to review and respond to requests and ensure equal consideration of all requests. This process should provide transparency and

consistency to citizens, City Council, and staff. Like NTC, project requests and their statuses should be published as a map and/or list on the City's website.

Critical Framing Questions

Requested projects should be analyzed using a scoring and prioritization system that considers:

- What street characteristics led to request (street width, traffic volume or speed, obstacles, poor sightlines due to topography, school proximity)?
- Would requested project remove or adversely impact mature trees or other mature vegetation? Would the project require voluntary easements? Would it require relocation or installation/removal of other infrastructure?
- Who has been engaged and supports the project?
- If upgrading an existing sidewalk, what are the potential benefits, such as improved ADA compliance, obstacle removal, or narrower street crossings?

Prioritization Matrix

This matrix could guide CACT recommendations to Council on which projects to prioritize for the coming year. Each year, the CACT would score each project request (1 [low] to 5 [high]) on a relative basis to other project requests and agree on the specific weighting for that year depending on current circumstances (availability of funding, staffing, population changes, etc.).

Criterion	Questions to assess when rating projects	Weight
Construction complexity (Cost)	• How many feet of sidewalk are requested? • Are non-voluntary easements required? • Would relocation of items such as utility poles, hydrants, fences, stairs, etc. be required? • Is additional infrastructure required (e.g., new stairs, railings/fences, retaining walls, stormwater management, refuge islands)?	15-25%
Maintenance drivers (Cost)	• Is additional maintenance beyond a standard sidewalk required (e.g., public plantings, raised crosswalk)?	5-15%
Stakeholder complexity (Cost and likelihood of approval)	• Does the project require voluntary easements from a small number of property owners who have not declared support? • Would the ideal version of the project require easements from many property owners?	0-10%

	• Does the project negatively impact other stakeholder groups (e.g., environmental, students, road users)?	
Local benefits (Impact)	• Would a project improve safe access to a school? • Is the request on a street that completely lacks sidewalks? • Will the project bring the sidewalk into ADA compliance, add width, remove tripping hazards, or remove obstacles? • Will requested project provide safer street crossings: more reasonable distance between crossings, shorter crossing distances, painted or implied crosswalks reach a sidewalk at both ends? • Would the project improve road safety or support neighborhood traffic calming goals? • Have there been safety issues, or is the area perceived as being unsafe for pedestrians? • Are local sidewalks used by bicyclists (including children)? • Does the project improve stormwater management or add trees?	25-35%
Local downsides (Impact)	• Can the increase in impervious surface be mitigated locally? • Would the project require removal of mature trees or other mature vegetation? • Would the project impair local character (e.g., historical properties)?	10-20%
Equity and inclusion (Impacts)	• Is the request in a neighborhood that the City considers underserved? • Will the project help people who use mobility devices move more safely? • Will the project improve the safety of more vulnerable people (e.g., children, elderly)? • Does the project provide a more equitable use of space for all modes of mobility (e.g., considering	10-15%

	transportation for those who cannot afford a private automobile)?	
Connectivity and integration (Impacts)	• Will the requested project complete a missing pedestrian link or improve access to community destinations (e.g., parks, schools)? • Does available information suggest latent demand for a sidewalk (e.g., worn paths in grass, high density of users tracked by fitness apps)? • Does this project support a broader City plan or project (e.g., Bicycle Master Plan)?	10-15%
Urgency and lack of alternatives (Alternatives)	• What is the consequence if this project is delayed a year? • If the project is not built, what is the consequence? • Is there a lower cost alternative (e.g., another route, converting part of the street to a "walking lane")? • Is there likelihood of another project that would accomplish the goals in the next 5 years (e.g., private development)?	5-10%
Funding availability (Cost)	• Is there a funding source available for this project that is not available to many others (e.g., a state grant)? • Would this project "round out" a budget of projects for the year (e.g., a smaller project among larger, high-priority ones)?	0-10%

Decision making

Prioritized projects can be approved if:

- A certain percentage of residents are supportive (as measured by a polling system like NTC Program)
- Required minimum of voluntary easements have been agreed to by property owners
- Funding is available

Please let CACT know if you would like any more details about these recommendations.